

Articles

Small Rules for Indie Game Devs

Introduction

Since some weeks I play a lot of indie and AAA games and for several reasons. I like to play computer games, I like to [write about computer games](#) and I want to stream games in the future. Yes, I want to test games professionally, because in my opinion there are far too few people who deal with these two topics, especially for Linux games. Do a review for a Windows game and you are only one of hundreds. With Apple it will be less again. With Linux you find only very few people and most of them do this only as a hobby. This is my market niche and I think I have a chance to establish myself there. To test games I buy them at [Steam](#) or download them at Gamejolt and Itch. If you are an indie game dev you can also and send me a link to your release.

Now I test about 40-50 games per month and my list is getting longer and longer. So I have enough to do. In order to be able to work fast on my own, I have set up some rules that make my work easier and I can pre-sort roughly in advance. These are rules that are not universal and only apply to me, other testers can have completely different requirements and as a trained computer scientist I am a little more strict. In addition I work with the operating system Manjaro and the window manager i3. I don't have a user interface, I just use the terminal. That is very often practical for me, but sometimes also exhausting when e.g. files are not properly named. I will establish a small standard here, if you want to stick to it is up to you, because there are certainly other Linux games testers. Unfortunately then your games will not appear on my site or stream. This article is work in progress and can change quickly.

Packing

If you publish your computer game on a platform like Gamejolt or Itchio, you have to follow a few rules. It's even stricter with Steam, but I can't confirm that because I haven't published a game there yet. First and foremost it's quite simple. Your game has to be archived so that the download doesn't take too long for the players. The best way is to use `.zip` as extension. Yes, there are also Linux/Unix (`.tar` or `.gz` etc.) specific archive formats but after my long experience Zip always works. `funnygame.zip` is a good start. Please don't use spaces, because they are exhausting for terminal users. You should also do without coarse letters, special characters and hyphens.

Numbers are okay, but not necessary. Bad examples are e.g. `TheFrogWar$. *gaME.zip` or `'finalG@meBoost.zip'`. There are people who *exemplarily* specify a version number, e.g. `ultimategame_1.3.0.6.zip`. You can also do without it, because version numbers should only be used internally or if you want to release your game as Open Source version. It is enough to publish the current version number on the release page.

When you have finished a game, please always release it as `.86` and `.x86_64` version. I couldn't test many games because there was only one x86 version available. So it should look like this: `mygame_x86` and `mygame_x86_64`. With `chmod +x mygame_x86_64` you make the file executable. With it I can start your game faster and don't have to enter repetitive commands into my terminal all the time. You put both files into a folder you call `mygame_linux`, which will be archived at the end like this: `mygame_linux.zip`. I've seen this before that developers sometimes only name it `linux.zip`. This is bad, because if this happens often I have several files which are named like this by my operating system: `linux.zip`, `linux(1).zip`, `linux(2).zip` etc. This messes up my folder structure. Sometimes Indie Game developers take part in a video game development competition (e.g. Ludum Dare), which I like. but please don't name your files as `LD44.x86_64`. If everyone does this I get confused with all the titles from the competition.

To make my life as a Linux game tester easier I ask you to make your files executable before you pack them. This is done with the simple command `chmod +x yourgame`. I'm testing about 60/80 games a week and at some point it's easy to just keep typing the same command into my terminal over and over again. It also helps computer gamers who haven't been using Linux for a long time to be able to use your game faster. This note is a personal request, because there are a lot of indie games released and any repetitive work before the actual test prevents me from testing your game longer. Since I have a very tight schedule, I have to cut back at certain points and that's usually not to your advantage.

There's something I've noticed a lot over the past few weeks. When I downloaded games from an indie game provider, I had some ugly content. Most providers have a virus scanner and test the archive packages they upload. Sometimes there seems to be something slipping through and not as well controlled as I would like it to be. I check every package I download again and if I get trojans, viruses or malware displayed and it's not a false flag, I will definitely not unpack the package on my operating system. I also don't report this to the communities, because I have 1.) no time and 2.) I don't get paid for it. I will simply ignore your game and there will be no review. If you want to get a rough overview, pack your archive package and upload it to Virustotal. Of course you can't be sure and you shouldn't rely on the snake oil industry, but I'd rather be a little more careful.

If a virus scanner shows something red, it can probably be a false flag, but if everything is red, you should not publish the game and reinstall your operating system.

Release Page (Itch)

A good release page has the following things on the website, some of them are optional, but the more you have, the more likely you are to succeed with your computer game.

- Header Picture with Game Title
- Short `.gif` Animation Picture
- Embedded Youtube Video
- Twitter Link
- What contains your Game (Level, min. Gameplay Minutes usw.)
- Min and Max System requirements
- Feedback Form
- Download Links

Fubenalvo, the developer of [Fluxcaves](#) has a professional release page. You're on the safe side with that. Of course I will also download your game if the list is not complete, but if there is nothing on your site I prefer not to download it. Most of the time these are only small releases of game jams that don't require much work. What I very often noticed with videos is that they are published in a bad quality. Your game may look good, but no one will watch a 480p video. You should record the video at least in 720p HD or 1080p HD. 1440p HD or 2160p 4K is not necessary for an indie game, unless your computer game has really good 3D graphics. I personally use [OBS](#) for my recordings.

Release Page (Twitter)

If you already have a character, set it as Avatar. This helps people to get a very quick overview of your production. Is the main protagonist, female, male, a clown, with a weapon or a cute bear. That's all information that's important. Nobody wants to waste their time on your Twitter profile because they can't find important information about you. The headline picture should include your game title, epic screenshots or game artwork. Among them the domain of your website, Game Studio logo, maybe even other links e.g. from Youtube.

In your profile you will find where your studio is, a short description and a link to your own domain with the contact page. I can't take a Facebook page as a developer page seriously, but rather an itch.io developer page. Seriously. An FB page is like a MySpace page for bands. Above is a pinned tweet with a short video, screenshot or artwork. In addition a short description text of your current project, three hashtags and (optional) a link to your sales page (Steam, Itch.io or Humble Bumble).

Post on the subject. On your Twitter page please post only relevant information about your current game project. This looks more professional. There can be anything like what you want, but don't retweet too much, otherwise it will clog up your information channel. Photos from fairs, festivals, conventions or from the game studio please on Instagram. They fit there much better. It's still best to have blog entries on your own website, but that's another topic. I advise against posting private information about you. You should also avoid posting on current political or religious topics, but that doesn't mean you have a clear opinion. But then you have to expect headwind, trolls and hate raids. This costs a lot of time and usually only creates trouble. I personally separate work from private topics. You can also express your political or religious opinion by likes.

Ingame

When you publish a game, the first language is always English. Not French. Not Spanish. Please release your indie game in english. It is very easy for many people on this planet to understand your game. I'm not letting the excuse apply that you're only 15 years old. You can ask your teacher, family or friends. Sometimes the internet helps. I had learned a little French at school and German is my mother tongue but I'm overwhelmed with Italian and so on. I don't speak these languages and if your game only offers this language I can't understand the content or read in the help if there are problems. So your game is out.

I prefer self made graphics (even if they are not professionally created) rather than [downloaded ones](#). This is not absolutely necessary, but it shows me that you've gone to a lot of trouble. If your game is well programmed and spa- done, a graphic artist will get in touch on his own. Please pay attention to a readable font in a suitable size. I've experienced it very often that I couldn't read the font. Please pay attention to people with a [red/green weakness](#). Even I can't read red writing on a green background without getting a headache.

If you are using a certain genre try to implement a controller into your game. Battle, car racing, sidescroller or platformer can be played better with controllers. First person shooter or strategy games rather with mouse and keyboard. If I have to use a jump and run with 17 keys, I don't do it because it's too complicated for me. I want to play your game and not study game design before.

Steam

If you want to sell your computer game on Steam, please refrain from [archivement spam](#). This is of no use to you, except that the customers will find the game again. It also throws a very bad picture

on you, if you want to bid on another game in the future, because such unclean tricks are spreading in the scene. Something that also bothers me on Steam is when game developers split their games into separate chapters. When I buy a game, I want a complete product, not a series. A series like [Deponina](#) is ok because it's all complete games. I don't like [Sally Face](#) or [Tales of the Neon Sea](#) in their current form. I get a feeling that as a player I should be milked like a cow. Sometimes I buy games because they are on sale and then I overlook that they have several chapters. When this is announced in the middle of the game I delete the game and don't buy any more chapters. When I buy a DVD box, I want all parts of a season and not just the first one.

I can understand if you as indie game developer like to program, draw etc. on your favourite system. Nevertheless, you should consider publishing not only for the Windows operating system, but also for Mac(Apple) or Linux. Many [AAA](#) studios don't do this because the service with Apple or Linux doesn't pay off and it costs them too much money. But I can assure you that the investment in the indie game area is worth it. Linux (I'll take it as an example because I know it best here) has gamer at the start as well as other operating systems. Linux is still a niche in gaming, but there is a lot of money in these niches. As a Linux user I prefer open source software (for which I also pay in another form), [but with games I actually always pay](#). If you only address Windows users with your game, you're wasting potential fans just because you wanted to save yourself a little work. As a programmer ([and part-time gamedev](#)) I know how easy it is for most engines to port to Linux and Mac. If you can't test it, that's no problem, because in most cases you'll find willing testers (if your game is good enough). My advice. Also port to Mac and Linux.

I've bought 300 games on Steam so far and there's a lot of junk among them. That's why I test computer games, because I want to work my way through all the crap to find the pearls. Anyway, I thought that I already saw everything that an indie game developer can do wrong. Apparently, the border to the top still seems to be quite open. If you really don't want me to play a game again, you should add an ad as a loading screen ([In-game advertising](#)). That didn't work back then and that's one of the reasons why [I don't buy mobile games](#). When I buy a game, even if it only cost 0,39€, I don't want to have an advertisement from a betting studio. That's really under all sows and leads to the fact that I put all games of the developer on the Ignore list. Whether it's worth it as an indie developer to run his reputation for a few cents is questionable but you won't get far with it. Advertising in computer games is a mockery for most gamers and will be punished.

Newsletter

I received a newsletter today and would like to comment on some points that have bothered me. The very first point is the most important one. Pack the download link to the top, preferably even from the actual text. I'm testing games and have no patience to read a long text about your game first, but I want access to your Alpha Demo as soon as possible. The most real computer players are even more impatient. If this link points to Diskord, where I can download the game, I don't do that. I have so many accounts related to gaming and yes, Diskord is important, but it stresses me to fill out a stupid robot captcha first to get to the game. Put your game somewhere where you can get there quickly, e.g. Gamejolt or Itch.